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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0122
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 0169
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 0131
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0128
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0131
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0159
RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TASHKENT 000217

SIPDIS SIPDIS
DEPT FOR SCA AND DRL
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PASS TO AMEMBASSY PODGORICA
AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PASS TO AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019-02-25
TAGS: PHUM KPAO PGOV PREL UZ
SUBJECT: UZBEKISTAN: JOURNALIST REPORTEDLY ARRESTED ON SUSPICION OF FRAUD

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CLASSIFIED BY: Richard Fitzmaurice, Poloff; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

11. (U) In an announcement on its website, the Ezgulik human rights group reported that independent journalist and human rights defender Dilurod Sayyidov was arrested in Tashkent on February 22 and handed over to authorities from Samarkand province on February 23. After his arrest, Sayyidov reportedly told Ezgulik deputy director Abdurakhmon Tashanov that authorities in Samarkand province had accused him of fraud.

AUTHORITIES SEARCH SAYYIDOV'S HOME

12. (C) On February 24, Tashanov reported being present as authorities searched Sayyidov's home in Tashkent and found nothing incriminating. According to Tashanov, Sayyidov has not yet been formally charged, but remains detained as a suspect (whether in Tashkent or Samarkand remains unclear).

SAYYIDOV REPORTEDLY ANGERED LOCAL OFFICIALS IN SAMARKAND

13. (C) Sayyidov's arrest also was reported by Rapid Reaction human rights group member Sukhrob Ismoilov, who explained that Sayyidov was in the process of assisting 10 farmers from Samarkand's Jomboy district that were engaged in unspecified legal actions against local officials. According to Ismoilov, local officials, including the deputy hokim (mayor) of Jomboy district, had recently threatened Sayyidov.

14. (C) Tashanov reported being told by the Samarkand Prosecutor's Office that a resident of Jomboy district, Marghuba Jurayeva, had been arrested while in possession of 10,000 dollars. After her arrest, Jurayeva allegedly claimed that Sayyidov had blackmailed a local farmer into paying the amount, which he then ordered her to pick up. The resident's stepfather reportedly told Tashanov that her daughter was a liar, but confirmed that she knew Sayyidov. In contrast, Sayyidov allegedly denied knowing Jurayeva.

BACKGROUND ON SAYYIDOV

15. (C) Sayyidov, an Embassy contact, worked as a journalist at a state-controlled newspaper until 2005, when he was fired after printing an article openly critical of authorities. Since then, he has worked for various independent human rights groups, including Ezgulik and the Rapid Reaction Group. He also has published articles on the independent Voice of Freedom website and has distributed additional articles on various human rights issues via email. Sayyidov is suffering from tuberculosis and received funding for medical treatment through the State Department's Global Defender's Fund last year. The last time poloff saw Sayyidov in December, his condition appeared stable. Sayyidov's reporting in the last few years has not been particularly noteworthy. He also

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has repeatedly (and unsuccessfully) applied through the Embassy's Democracy Commission to fund various project proposals, but they were uniformly vague and often included the names of individuals who later told Emboffs that they knew nothing of Sayyidov's proposals.

COMMENT

16. (C) We will continue to follow Sayyidov's case as closely as possible. Sayyidov was most likely targeted because of his specific involvement in the farmers' case in Samarkand, rather than his writing or general human rights activity. As Ismoilov speculated, we believe it is possible that Sayyidov's arrest was arranged by local officials in Samarkand province who were upset with the role he might have played in assisting the farmers. Provincial-level authorities have been known to frame human rights activists on fraud or similar charges, the most recent victim being Akzam Turgunov, who was imprisoned on politically motivated charges of extortion by local authorities in Uzbekistan's autonomous republic of Karakalpakstan in October 2008.

NORLAND

To view the entire SMART message, go to URL http://repository.state.sgov.gov/_layouts/OSS_SearchResults.aspx?k=messageid:fba0e5c9-5de8-4906-97